

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-12 IO-13 /094 W
-----122302 241948Z /45

R 241850Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4764
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 02271

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PERP, CA, VN, CH, FR
SUBJECT: FRENCH VIEWS OF INDOCHINA

SUMMARY. IN A PERIODIC TOUR D'HORIZON, QUAI DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR ASIA DOPFFER WAS PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN DISCUSSING THE KHMER/VIETNAMESE BORDER CONFLICT. WHILE UNABLE TO VERIFY THE VALIDITY OF REPORTS, THE FRENCH HAVE BEEN STRUCK BY THE VIETNAMESE CLAIMS OF PROBES DEEP WITHIN KAMPUCHEAN TERRITORY DESIGNED TO SHOW VIETNAMESE MILITARY PREPONDERANCE. THE VIETNAMESE NOW CLAIM TO HAVE WITHDRAWN COMPLETELY. THE FRENCH THINK THE VIETNAMESE BASIC INTENTION IS NOT ONLY TO DEFEND THEIR FRONTIERS AND ARRIVE AT A SOLUTION BASED ON THEIR VIEWS, BUT ALSO TO SEE A MORE CONGENIAL REGIME EMERGE IN PHNOM PENH. THE SRV WILL NOT ACT DIRECTLY BECAUSE OF FEAR OF CHINESE REACTION. ALTHOUGH TENG HSIAO-P'ING SPOKE ABOUT THE PROBLEM WITH SERENITY, THE FRENCH BELIEVE THAT THE CHINESE ARE REALLY WORRIED AND EMBARRASSED BY THE CONFLICT, WHICH HARMS THEIR INTERESTS. THE FRENCH WONDER WHETHER THERE IS A POSSIBILITY
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THE CHINESE ARE ADVISING PHNOM PENH TO STRENGTHEN AN INDEPENDENT KHMER GOVERNMENT BY GIVING A GREATER ROLE TO SIHANOUK. SINO/VIETNAMESE RELATIONS ARE APPARENTLY TROUBLED NOT ONLY BY THE KHMER/VN CONFLICT, BUT ALSO BY A CONTINUATION OF SOME SINO/VN BORDER PROBLEMS. THE FRENCH WOULD APPRECIATE ANY HARD INFORMATION WE HAVE CONCERNING THE KHMER/VN CONFLICT. END SUMMARY.

1. KHMER/VIETNAMESE CONFLICT: THE FRENCH HAVE PICKED UP MOST OF THEIR INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONFLICT FROM VIETNAMESE SOURCES IN BOTH HO CHIH MINHVILLE AND HANOI. WHILE VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS HAVE REASONS FOR DEFORMING THE REPORTS, SOME OF THEM ARE CORROBORATED BY OTHER SOURCES THERE. THE VIETNAMESE HAVE SAID THEY MOUNTED PROBES WHICH WENT FAR INTO KAMPUCHEA GETTING VERY CLOSE TO PHNOM PENH AND KOMPONG SOM -- THERE WERE EVEN RUMORS OF A SEA LANDING BY THE VIETNAMESE. THE VIETNAMESE HAVE OBVIOUSLY WISHED THE FRENCH TO BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE CAPABLE OF DOING ANYTHING MILITARILY THAT THEY WISH. THE FRENCH HAVE THE IMPRESSION NOW THAT THE VIETNAMESE HAVE PULLED COMPLETELY BACK FROM THESE POSITIONS AND ARE NOW BASICALLY ON THEIR SIDE OF THE BORDER. ONE THING WHICH THE FRENCH CANNOT UNDERSTAND IS WHY THE VIETNAMESE HAVE NOT REFERRED MORE FREQUENTLY TO THE 1966 BORDER AGREEMENT CONCERNING THE LAND FRONTIER. IT IS ALSO NOT CLEAR JUST WHAT IT IS THE KHMER WISH NOR WHY THE VIETNAMESE HAVE SAID SO LITTLE ABOUT KHMER DEMANDS -- IT SEEMS THEY MAY HAVE SPOKEN OF "RATIONALIZING" THE BORDERS WHICH THEREFORE SCRAPPED PREVIOUS AGREEMENTS AND INVALIDATED THE FRENCH MAPS CITED BY THE VIETNAMESE AS THE BASIS OF AN AGREEMENT. THE FRENCH WOULD APPRECIATE ANY HARD FACTS WE COULD GIVE THEM ABOUT THE CURRENT MILITARY SITUATION FROM SATELLITE PHOTOGRAPHY

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OR PICK-UP OF OPEN COMMUNICATIONS.

2. VIETNAMESE INTENTIONS: THE FRENCH THOUGHT IT CLEAR THAT THE VIETNAMESE INTENTIONS WENT INDEED BEYOND THE SETTLEMENT OF THE GEOGRAPHIC FRONTIER. WHILE THE SRV WOULD NOT INTERVENE CRUELY TO SET UP ANOTHER REGIME, IT CLEARLY WISHED TO SEE POLITICAL MODIFICATIONS IN PHNOM PENH WHICH WILL MAKE THEIR RELATIONS EASIER. THE VIETNAMESE MUST, OF COURSE, TAKE CHINESE SENSIBILITIES INTO CONSIDERATION, AND PEKING WOULD CERTAINLY OPPOSE ANYTHING RESEMBLING A VIETNAMESE PUPPET REGIME IN PHNOM PENH. HANOI CLEARLY THINKS THAT THE CURRENT LEADERS ARE MAD AND WILL NOT LONG BE ABLE TO CONTROL KAMPUCHEA BECAUSE OF THEIR IRRATIONAL AND INEFFECTIVE POLICIES. VIETNAM WISHES TO MAKE SURE THAT WHEN REVOLUTION OR EVOLUTION OCCURS IN KAMPUCHEA, IT WILL BE IN HANOI'S FAVOR. THE FRENCH THOUGHT THAT WHILE THE KHMER/VIETNAMESE CONFLICT COULD STIMULATE KHMER NATIONALISM AND A WAR SITUATION COULD PROVIDE JUSTIFICATION FOR A CONTINUATION AND PERHAPS AN INCREASE IN EXTREME MEASURES, THE CONFLICT PROBABLY ALSO COULD PUT GREAT STRAINS ON THE VERY SMALL KHMER COMMUNIST APPARATUS.

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SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-12 IO-13 /094 W
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 02271

WITH A FURTHER INCREASE IN PARANOIA AMONG THE DK LEADERS, THEY COULD INTRODUCE NEW PURGES OF PROVINCIAL CADRE WHICH COULD STIMULATE PROVINCIAL OPPOSITION TO THE PHNOM PENH LEADERSHIP. DOPFFER COMMENTED THAT NO ONE KNOWS VERY MUCH ABOUT THE DYNAMICS OF THE KAMPUCHEAN POLITICAL SITUATION, BUT THE VIETNAMESE CLEARLY THOUGHT THEY COULD PLAY WITH IT AND THE CHINESE ARE CLEARLY WORRIED.

3. CHINESE VIEW OF THE CONFLICT: DOPFFER SAID HE HAD SEEN A REPORT OF THE BARRE/TENG HSIAO-P'ING CONVERSATION CONCERNING THE CONFLICT, BUT TO DATE HE HAS SEEN ONLY THE PRESS ACCOUNTS OF BARRE'S CONVERSATION WITH TENG YING-CHAO. TENG HSIAO-P'ING ADDRESSED THE KHMER/VIETNAMESE CONFLICT SQUARELY: HE DID ATTEMPT TO BE EVASIVE. HE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE PRC CONSIDERS THE VIETNAMESE TO BE MORE AT FAULT THAN THE KHMER. NONETHELESS, THE KHMER ARE ALSO IN THE WRONG. TENG SAID THAT CHINA SUPPORTED KAMPUCHEA, BUT THAT ITS SUPPORT
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WOULD BE LIMITED. TENG TREATED THE MATTER AS THOUGH IT WAS NOT GREATLY TROUBLING CHINA, BUT THE FRENCH INFERRED REPEAT INFERRED FROM TENG'S AND OTHER CHINESE REMARKS THAT THE PRC IS INDEED WORRIED AND EMBARRASSED BY THE CONFLICT AND BELIEVES THAT IT MUST STAY OUT OF IT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE BECAUSE IT IS A POSSIBLE TRAP FOR CHINA. WHILE THE CHINESE CONSIDER THAT NEGOTIATIONS ARE THE BEST SOLUTION, THEY HAVE STRONG SUSPICIONS ABOUT VIETNAMESE AND SOVIET INTENTIONS. THEY CLEARLY CONSIDER THAT BOTH THE CONFLICT AND ITS RESOLUTION COULD HARM THE INTERESTS OF CHINA.

4. THE CHINESE ARE APPARENTLY CONCERNED THAT THE SOVIETS ARE TRYING TO USE THE CONFLICT TO WORSEN CHINESE RELATIONS WITH VIETNAM. DOPFFER THOUGHT THAT THE SOVIETS WERE PROMPTING THE EASTERN EUROPEANS AND OTHERS TO CLAIM THAT CHINA WAS BEHIND THE KHMER ATTACKS IN ORDER TO PROVOKE THE CHINESE INTO CRITICIZING THE VIETNAMESE -- AND THE SOVIETS -- THEREBY INCREASING THE TENSIONS BETWEEN PEKING AND HANOI.

5. SIHANOUK: DOPFFER SAID THAT SOME MONTHS AGO THE VIETNAMESE MADE A POINT OF TELLING THE FRENCH THAT THEY CONTINUED TO HAVE THEIR HIGH ESTEEM FOR SIHANOUK, AND AT THE TIME THE FRENCH WONDERED WHETHER THE VIETNAMESE MIGHT HAVE BEEN THINKING OF BASING THEIR GAME SOMEWHAT ON SIHANOUK. THE FRENCH NO LONGER HAVE THIS VIEW OF VIETNAMESE INTENTIONS, BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, THEY HAVE HEARD RUMORS FROM CHINESE SOURCES THAT THE CHINESE COULD HAVE BEEN TALKING WITH POL POT AND COMPANY ABOUT A ROLE FOR SIHANOUK. DOPFFER THOUGHT IT SIGNIFICANT THAT WHILE PENN NOUTH'S COMMUNICATIONS WERE HARD-LINED PRODUCTS GIVEN TO HIM TO SIGN, THERE WERE SOME INDICA-
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TIONS THAT SIHANOUK WAS ABLE TO EXERT SOME SMALL CONTROL OVER WHAT APPEARED IN HIS MESSAGES. THE FRENCH DID NOT ASK WHETHER TENG YING-CHAO HAD SEEN SIHANOUK WHEN SHE WAS IN PHNOM PENH, BUT THEY ARE WAITING TO HEAR WHAT THE PRC MAY SAY ABOUT THE INTERNAL POLITICAL PROBLEMS OF CAMBODIA (INCLUDING A POSSIBLE ROLE FOR SIHANOUK).

6. SINO-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS: THE CHINESE THOUGHT THAT IN ADDITION TO THE 1976 CONFLICTS ALONG THE SINO/VIETNAMESE LAND BORDER, THE VIETNAMESE PRESS HAD RECENTLY SPOKEN OF THE NEED OF IMPROVING THE DEFENSE OF DAO BAC

LONG VI ISLAND. ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT AN ISLAND EVER CLAIMED BY CHINA, THE FRENCH THOUGHT THAT THERE MUST HAVE BEEN SOME SINO/VIETNAMESE INCIDENT IN THE AREA. THE FRENCH DID NOT SEE ANY PROSPECTS FOR RAPID RESOLUTION OF THE BORDER PROBLEMS BY THE BORDER COMMISSION, BUT IT SEEMED THAT THE PROBLEMS ALONG THE LAND FRONTIER HAVE BEEN BROUGHT SUFFICIENTLY UNDER CONTROL TO AVOID ARMED INCIDENTS. AS FOR THE SPRATLEYS, THE VIETNAMESE CLEARLY HAVE WISHED TO LINE UP SUPPORT FOR THEIR POSITION BY DISCUSSING THEM WITH THE PHILIPPINES, INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA -- THEY HAVE OF COURSE NOT TALKED WITH THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA. DOPFFER EXPECTED SINO/VIETNAMESE RELATIONS TO BE AN INTERESTING SUBJECT TO FOLLOW IN THE COMING YEAR.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, BORDER INCIDENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978PARIS02271
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780036-0156
Format: TEL
From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780129/aaaaaycu.tel
Line Count: 239
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 27e4a1e0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3723308
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FRENCH VIEWS OF INDOCHINA SUMMARY. IN A PERIODIC TOUR D'HORIZON, QUAI DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR ASIA DOPFFER WAS PARTICULARLY INTERES
TAGS: PEPR, PBOR, CA, VM, CH, FR, (DOPFERR), (HARTMAN, ARTHUR W)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/27e4a1e0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014